

The City Speaks

The background is a vibrant yellow. Overlaid on this are various white geometric patterns: a grid of horizontal lines with downward-pointing arrows, a vertical column of upward-pointing chevrons, and several sets of horizontal bars. A large, expressive black ink wash or brushstroke dominates the right side, extending from the top right towards the bottom. Faint, thin white lines crisscross the composition, some forming a grid and others as irregular paths.

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Thesis for the Master of Fine Arts,
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

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The City Speaks

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
of the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

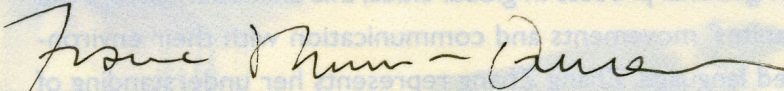
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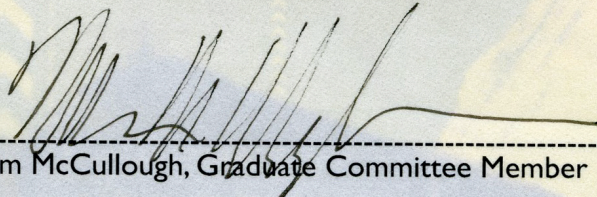
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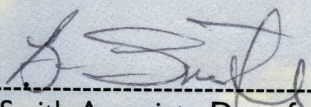
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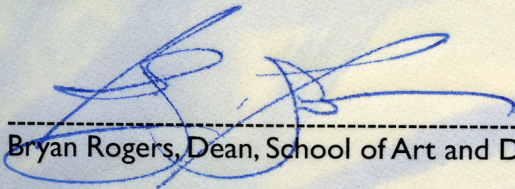
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Abstract

The City Speaks tells a story about an urbanite's daily life in a city where everything transforms from physical elements to symbols through a three dimensional projected animated video. Referring to people's navigational process in global cities, this animation covers the tacit agreement between urbanites' movements and communication with their environments without using text-based language. Zhang Zhang represents her understanding of city life through visual language based on her experience of living in Shanghai and other international cities. She responds to the global unification of urbanization using combination of traditional Chinese art and digital animation skills.

Keywords: Global, Animation, Communication, Chinese art, Experience, International, Language, Urbanization, Shanghai



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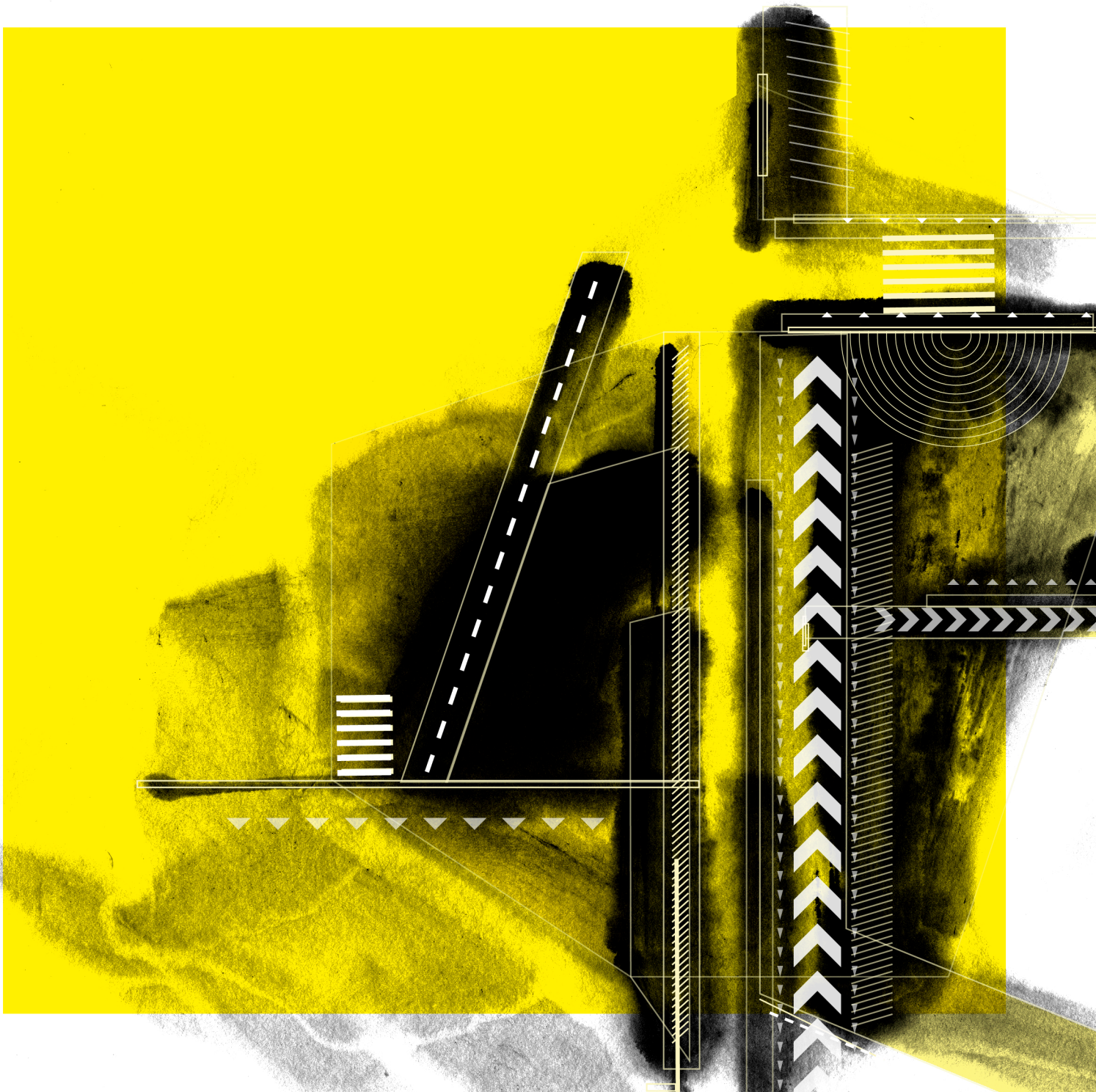


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1. Introduction

I was born and raised in Shanghai, currently China's biggest center of immigration (Xu 26). As Luya Zhang said in his book, *Never Comes to Shanghai*, "in Shanghai, you can see the body of Paris, the face of New York, the steps of Tokyo and the atmosphere of Hong Kong." Shanghai has been regarded as one of the global cities in the world. Due to my urban upbringing in such a global city, I am deeply influenced by so-called "city culture" that, beneath its chaotic appearance, reflects the highly ordered movements of urbanites and vehicles. I left home seven years ago and travelled around the world in many different cities. I started to notice that no matter where I went, I could move through that area very fluidly by recalling my previous urban experience in Shanghai, even without knowing the local language. The elements that helped me invoke my past experiences of city culture were public signs and the similar appearance of contemporary architecture. These similar visual elements were the "keys" for me to understand the urban mode of living and how a global megalopolis develops its own mode of communication. Inspired by my city experiences, I made this animated video projection that shows how the city "speaks" its own rules of living through "symbol language" (Figure 1).

I created symbols which have the features of words by abstracting the internal similarities from city architecture and sign images. In this animation, projected in three-dimensional space, the audience experiences a city where physical environments transform into symbols, and the movements of urbanites follow such changes at a stable and regular pace

(Figure 2). In *Urban World/Global City*, David Clark states, “Most inhabitants in a global city are imbued with a similar set of all encompassing urban attitudes and values and follow common modes of behavior” (Clark 10). As an observer to this behavior stemming from globalization in world cities, I aim to visualize the tacit agreements of communication between urbanites and the poetic rhythm of the contemporary lives in global cities.

1.1 Life in Cities

Since childhood, I have been intensely interested in city life. I was born and raised in Shanghai, a metropolis that has been influenced by cultures from all around the world. Therefore, Shanghai contains conflicts between Chinese traditional culture and urban culture as a result of globalization. My goal was to explore and represent these conflicts through daily life, and Shanghai’s history of absorbing western culture made it an ideal location for my study of cities transformed by globalization. Shanghai had been completely urbanized by the time I was born, and the conflicts between the rural and the urban have not diminished with time; in fact they continue to be evident not only in China but in other countries as well: “The progressive shift of people from rural into urban places is accompanied by profound and far reaching changes in the ways in which many of them live their daily lives,” stated David Clark (134). When people are consistently emigrating to the city from rural areas, the differences rooted in the two cultures frequently cause misunderstanding.

My early art work focused on representing these conflicts between the urban modernity and the traditional culture. In the painting *City Path* (Figure 3), red strings and points symbolize the foundation of society that used to be rooted in China’s rural culture. This conflict is contrasted by the ink tracks that represent the current urban structures, such as buildings and streets. Both the tracks and the strings represent opposing positions

and the interactions between the process of contemporary urbanization and the Chinese traditional social mechanisms founded on the basis of kinship. Similarly, in the animation *Balloon* (Figures 4), the struggles of city life are represented by red balloons with clocks on their surfaces, suggesting that society has been invaded by urbanization. Yet my interest involved in the conflicts in urbanization has shifted away from these concepts to focus on studying how people have adapted their movements as a result of urbanization—which I have experienced both extensively and profoundly. I left my city and through my international travel, I learned that since “urban influences are extended well beyond settlement boundaries by long-distance travel, telecommunications and the mass media,” this adaptation process happens both domestically, culturally and globally (Clark 134). This adaptation had become salient to me during my recent urban experiences and inspired me to illustrate this phenomenon through artwork.

What I found through my experiences is that no matter where I went, cities had adapted in similar ways: “Despite the infinite and intricate variations of tradition and culture that exist within and between nations, cities appear to have, and to be acquiring, more in common than they have differences. Urban places have many similarities of physical appearance.” (Clark 2). These physical similarities came across most clearly in cities where I did not speak the language. When I traveled to different cities, I thought I would have to rely on the local language to navigate the space. However, in all the cities I traveled to—New York, Tokyo, Paris, London, Munich and Rome—the local language was not my mother tongue. In fact, in some places, I could not understand the language at all. During my stay in these cities, I started to realize that even though I would live in each city only temporarily, “the city offer[ed] itself as a real and imaginary place, an easy-to-read map.” (Hou 17) I could still move among the locals fluidly and with the same familiarity that I felt in Shanghai. Because cities have such uniform structures, I was able to use senses other than verbal communica-

tion to navigate the space. The similarities in urban structures--streets, subway stations and buildings--and the symbols found in most public spaces, became the essential “language” that allow me to “read” the city and quickly assimilate information.

In *Reading the City: Between Memory-Image and Distorted Topography*, Weigel describes this concept: “Hearing and seeing become skills within a conception of the legibility of the history to be deciphered in the city’s images; and these images in turn become ‘thought-images’ (Denkbilder) of the city’s cultural history”(34). These “thought-images” work like language in that they let us access our own past experiences using the cities we are from. Weigel goes on to describe “how former experiences, habits, cultural practices, desires, social behaviors, and symbolic orders have become visible signatures inscribed into images of the city. Through reading its topography, the city can be seen as a scenario of memory images and traces of the culture” (23). This perspective is consistent with my feeling of adaptation when living in different cities. After my extensive international travel, my artwork began to focus on the absence of text-based language in city life. For example, in the digital prints *The Portraits of the City* (Figures 5), I used blank dialogue boxes to represent the neglect of local language. Figures in this series of work have had their brains removed and symbolize the visual and muscle memory of traversing the city that has become so deeply embedded in the viewers’ thoughts that it determines their physical and emotional experience in the metropolis.

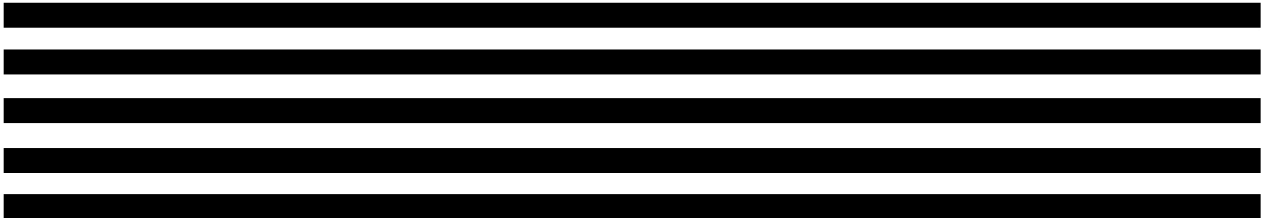




Figure 1

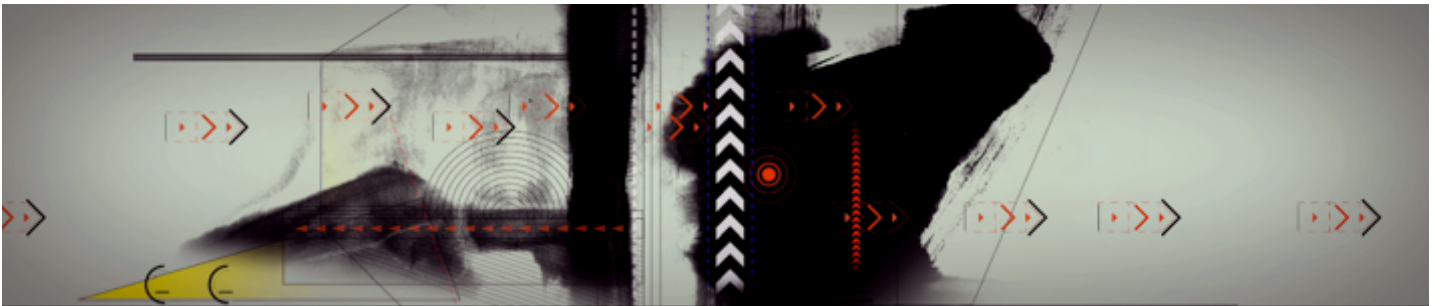


Figure 2



Figure 3 *City Path*, 2008, Ink on paper



Figure 4. *Balloon*, 2008, Animation



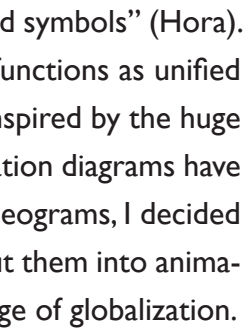
Figure 5. *The Portrait of the City*, 2009, Digital Illustration

1.2 Transformation of Communication

For this project, I considered design in terms of hardware and software, which together I refer to as “unified design.” Hardware refers to architecture and other city structures like bus stops, subway stations, and elevators. Software refers to symbols and signage that give directions. Both these design types tend to be visually similar, which has transformed how people communicate with their environment and each other. Instead of using words to deliver information, unified design provides people with information through visual images or patterns (Figures 6). Therefore, urban “thought, relationship and behavior are carried and spread by movements of people and flows of information and ideas well beyond city boundaries.” (Clark 13). The unification of these public symbols offers a fair opportunity for urbanites who have moved from other countries to understand a certain meaning through visual patterns. Unified agreements about design have simplified the navigation of a city—including its space, its machines, its modes of transportation—and thus, has reduced the anxiety of being in a new urban place. Through this agreement on design, communication can cross the boundaries of countries and languages. Since modes of delivering information have dramatically improved and global communication continues to proliferate, unified design has become ubiquitous in metropolises around the world. This positive influence that unified design has brought to both urban developments and urbanites’ emotional states became the starting point of the thesis project.

1.3 Symbols as Language

Unified design has determined the pace of human movement in urban life and this pace influences new design in return. This symbiotic relationship is poetic and reveals the beauty of urban life and its orderliness. The more experience I have in big cities, the more I notice that street signs, symbols of navigation, and interior physical structures in public spaces (subway gates, escalators, elevators) form patterns that create “an alternate universe of



visual communication with its own language of form, function, color and symbols” (Hora). The patterns contain familiar visual information and this information functions as unified visual language that lets people communicate with the environment. Inspired by the huge influence of visual unification on the design in cities where the information diagrams have taken the place of text-based language and also inspired by Chinese ideograms, I decided to use symbols to visualize the communication process in cities and put them into animation that shows the transformation that happens in cities during the age of globalization.

As an outsider in other countries and a visual artist, I have a greater sensitivity when reading visual signs and noticing architecture when I use them to get acquainted with foreign places. In some ways, “the Age of Reading Images has already come” described by Bing Xu, when talking about his work *Ground Book* that using existed signs to create a visual language (Figures 7). However that for my thesis project, I visualized the symbol language that could naturally arise from the symbols already present in global city and imitated the connection this language makes between urbanites and urban life (Figures 8). Because I am also influenced by the Chinese language, I took the foundation of Chinese typography (Figures 9), an ideogram that conveys its meaning through pictorial resemblance to a physical object (Wiki), and used the philosophy behind this approach to language to create symbols of urban movement. I took into consideration what Gyorgy Kepes stated in his book *The New Landscape in Art and Science*: “symbols allow one to move beyond ‘thing seeing’ and toward ‘a pattern seeing,’ this active mode of perception would favor ‘interactions, not things’” (206). I want the audience to feel they are experiencing a process of interaction with information about the city when looking at the visual symbols.



Figure 6. Public Signs, German railway company Deutsche Bahn AG



Figure 7. Xu Bing, *Ground Book*, 2007, Interactive Installation



Figure 8

| <i>fish</i> | <i>bird</i> | <i>sheep</i> |
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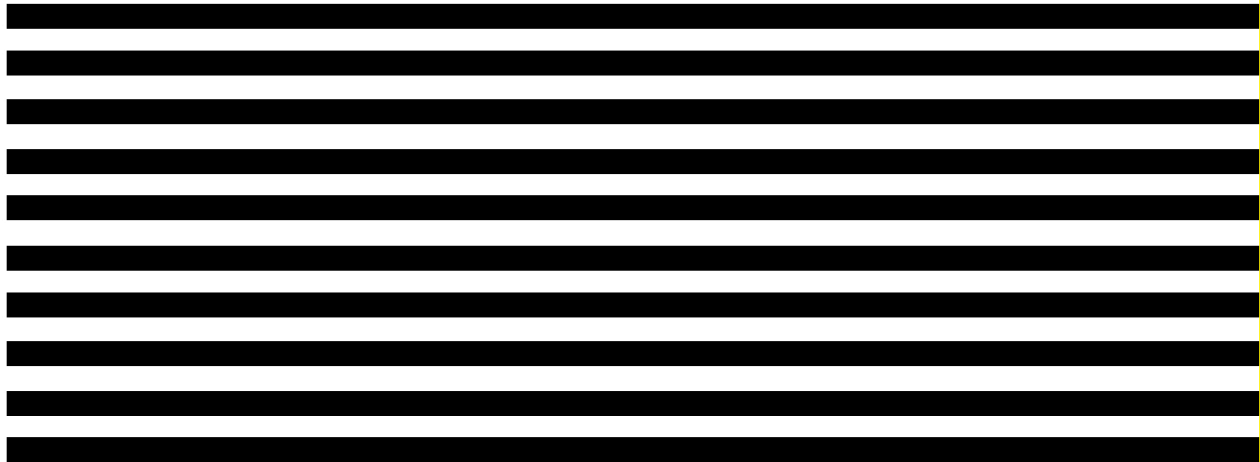
Figure 9. Chinese Characters

2. Symbols Design

2.1 The Creation of Symbols

I chose two sources of inspiration for the design of the symbols: signage systems and architectural outlines. Through the abstraction of these two elements, I use point, line and curve, the most basic geometric figures, to convey the common properties of symbols and the built world, giving them language-like features. Signage systems (Figures 10) that are visually oriented information systems, consist of signs, maps, arrows, color coding systems, pictograms and different typographic elements that are used in most public spaces, such as subway stations, airports and streets. Designed based on people's habits of daily life, these public signs represent the formation of symbol language and the influence of global urbanization. Because actions rely on the directions given by these signs in urban settings, especially in foreign countries, they can be regarded as a foundational and unspoken agreement among people of all nations, especially those who relocate worldwide.

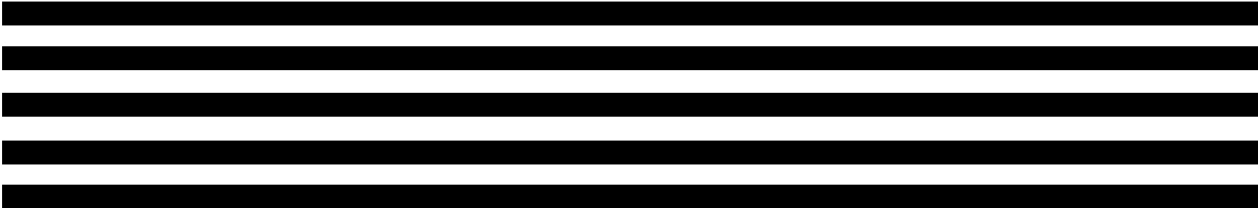

The second basis for these symbols in this animation are the outlines of architecture, including streets, buildings, windows, and other facilities (Figure 11). The photo *Shinju-Ku*



(*Skyscrapers*), *Tokyo 1986*, taken by Thomas Struth, refers to universal rather than local features of architecture (Figures 12). As stated by David Clark in *Urban World/Global City*, “the elements in many urban skylines are the same, as commercial and residential areas are increasingly dominated by high-rise developments constructed in international styles. Streetscapes across the world are adjusting in the same way to accommodate the needs of the ubiquitous car, so cities are fast losing their individual layouts and architectural identities” (6). Due to this homogenization, urbanites worldwide have common experiences passing by the gates in subway stations, finding their way in airports, or even taking elevators with crowds of other people. When in a foreign country, I can move easily in its cities as compared to its rural areas because my early experiences in cities are “providing insight without conscious or language-based thought” (Gregory 454-471). This makes me feel that familiarity with the exterior architecture is the real language with which I communicate fluently with the environment, and thus architecture outlines became the other resource for my symbol creation.

2.2 The Application of Symbols

In the animated film, symbols are visual objects that take the place of traditional ways of “seeing” the natural world. To visualize the regular pace of movement and the similarity of lifestyles in different cities, I use geometric patterns to simplify the exteriors of cityscapes and to highlight their internal regulation. The appearance of symbols indicates group actions, such as pedestrians or traffic, but it also symbolizes the regulation of normal actions in city life, including the open/close motion of automatic doors or getting on or off subway trains. By using these kinds of symbols, I want to indicate implicit agreement about group action is created by the unconscious influence of universal design and globalization. Such symbols are the product of both the requirements of global communication and the connection between the physical world and urban culture.



I also invoked the commonalties between Chinese painting (Figure 13) and public symbols, in that one part or even one element of an object can symbolize the whole world or an abstract patterns can symbolize group identity. Therefore, I used geometric symbols to represent more than the elements themselves. The cars are not only cars, but also reflect part of the traffic system. The streets are not just streets but also represent the overall landscape of the city. Therefore, by taking into account the entire system, these symbols do not just replace natural objects, but became a language that represents the nature order (Figure 14). Since these symbols are visualized in this way, they gain the ability to be used like language. They do not only reflect the real world indirectly, but also comments on it directly, through the combinations of images. The abstract symbols in this animation still provide a sense of growth and motion even within static patterns. The use of vector images also echoes the digital information age, where tele-communication plays a crucial role in the globalization of cities.



Figure 10. Navigation signs in London Tube

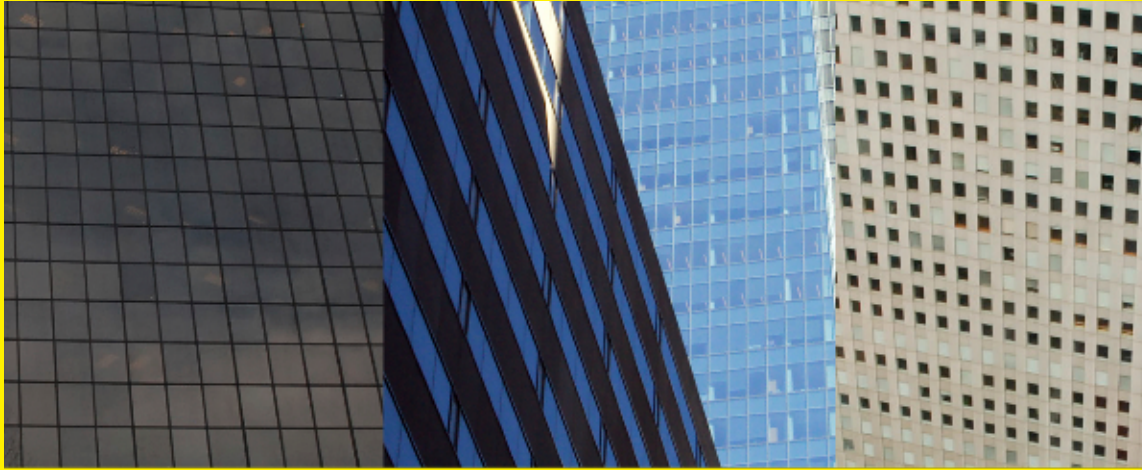


Figure 11. Windows in different cities



Figure 12. Thomas Struth, Shinju-Ku(Skyscrapers), 1986, Photograph

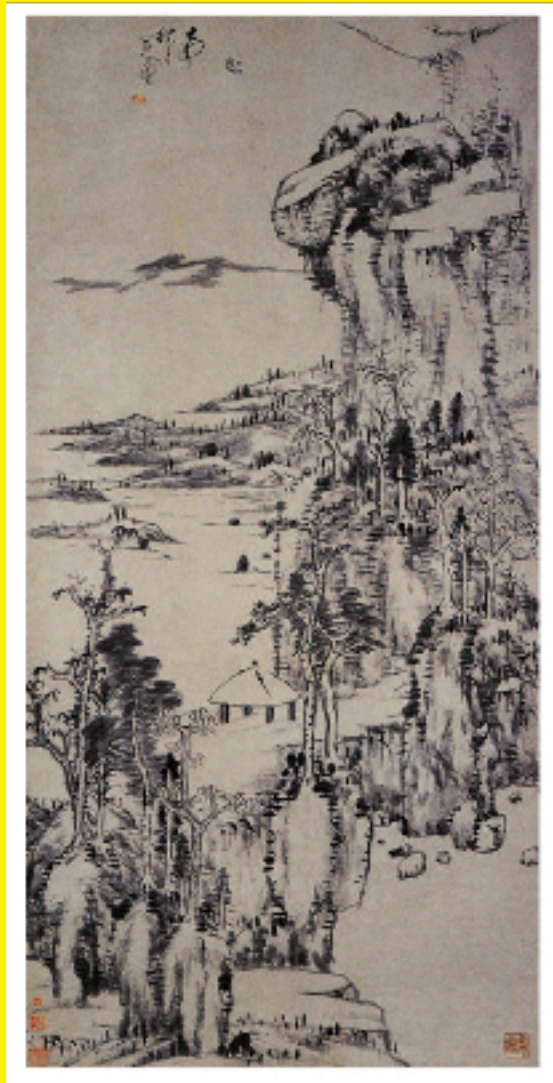


Figure 13. 八大山人, Ba Da Shan Ren, Poetic, Qing Dynasty, Chinese Landscape Painting

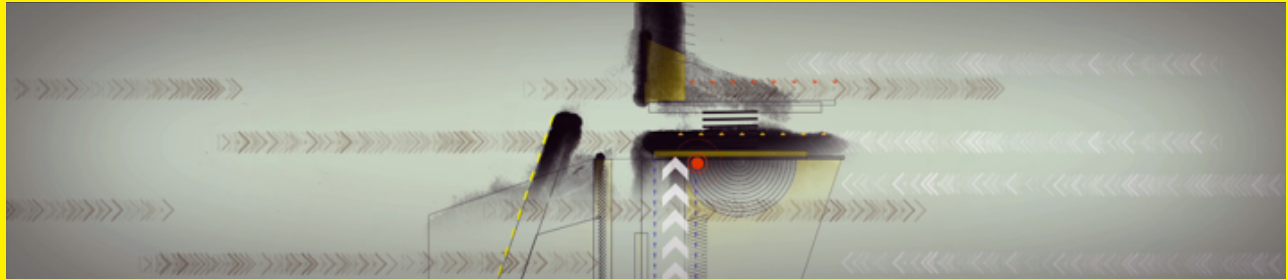


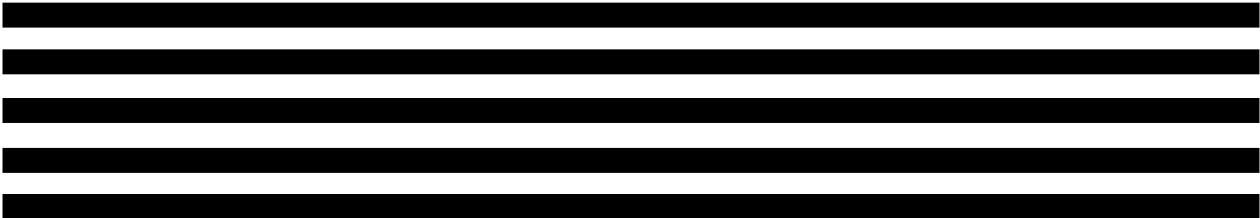
Figure 14

3. Animation

3.1 The Story in the Symbol World

I chose to use animation to tell the story of these symbols. The main concept of the animation is about a man's experience in a world where everything transfers from the physical world into symbols until he himself finally turns into symbols as well. The animated scenes are set in locations where city life typically occurs-- apartments, subway stations, office buildings and busy streets. Along with the character's route of movement, the environment around him turns into symbols. By showing one day in the character's life, the animation shows his navigation and interaction with both urbanites and the environment in the city.

Just as the city is no particular city, the man has no name—he is representative of all urbanites and through this symbolizing process, the city contains the parts common to all cities around the world. The symbolization of the environment also blurs the boundaries that exist between memory and reality; mental action and bodily action; and the natural and the cultural. By depicting the city in this way, the animation indicates that even city life often appears complex and chaotic at first glance. But upon second look, it is evident that it is actually a highly controlled system (Figure 15). From my point of view, cities are not created by any one specialist or expert. Urbanites are the people who can have a great impact on improving the cities in which they live. A city's internal system is created by the communication between urbanites and their environment and embedded in daily life. In this interaction between the changing world and the character's movements, communication occurs in both directions (Figure 16). Symbols prompt the movement of people in the city, while at the same time, these symbols are the reflections of people's movement habits and their memories of previous experiences with city life. This symbiotic relation-



ship between universalized city life and the movement of highly controlled urbanites is the core content of the animation. The following sections will introduce the roles played by four aspects of the animation.

Walking

The character walks throughout almost the entire movie, and most of the plots are connected by his walking (Figure 17), such as walking into the subway station, walking in the streets and walking by the bus station. Whenever the character walks, his entrance into each space initiates the transformation of each area. The walking scene does not simply describe the man's action, but it symbolizes how we experience space with our own bodies. I use his walking to embody the communication between people and their environment. The environment forms urbanites' life-styles while urbanites remember such transformation through bodily experience and visual recording, both consciously and subconsciously. This process of transformation is gentle and quiet, just like the walking. The slow speed of the walking symbolizes the slow process of forming urban memory. The walking on the ground is the same as writing on paper; it records the symbiotic relationship between urbanites and their environment in everyday life.

Dissolving

The city's transformation process is one of deconstruction of the urban environment that

is visualized in dissolving images (Figure 18). Based on Chinese landscape painting, the bleeding of the ink track represents a sense of growth, penetration, and the tendency for change. Thus, I used it to express the main process of transformation. The dissolving does not only happen to the environment, but also to the character, who ultimately transforms into unified symbols. The frequency and fluency of such change (dissolving) symbolizes the transformation from the external appearance to the internal regulation of city life, and also the sense of familiarity urbanites have when exchanging information with their physical environments.

Adaptation

The physical environment and the character in the animation interact based on the process of adaptation. Gandhi stated, “Adaptability is not imitation. It means power of resistance and assimilation” (65). In other words, imitation means copying something, while adaptation requires a mutual agreement between one’s own culture and the culture of the city. Even though we have different cultural backgrounds, the city is a place where cultures come together and eventually come to an agreement about the rules of urban life. By combining the abstract symbols with the real view of urban environments and the geometric figures with the irregularities of ink, I represent the mixing of different cultures through the transformation of visual elements (Figure 19). To present this process of adaptation in animation, both the architecture and the urbanites become symbols. At the end of the animation, even the character himself becomes a symbol; he transforms once he understands the mutually determined rules of city life (Figure 20). His transformation represents how we adapt to city life ourselves. The rhythm of movements, the pace of actions, and sense of personal space within city life create a poetic rhythm that reflects how different cultures are harmonized through a tacit agreement about city culture (Figure 21).

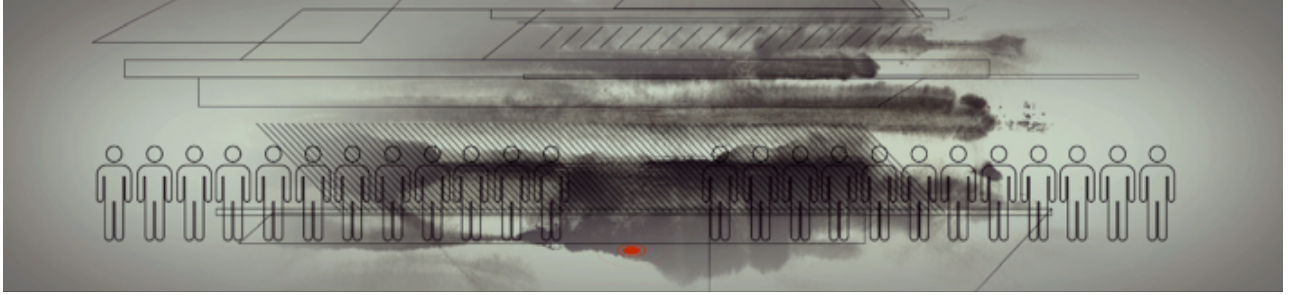


Figure 15

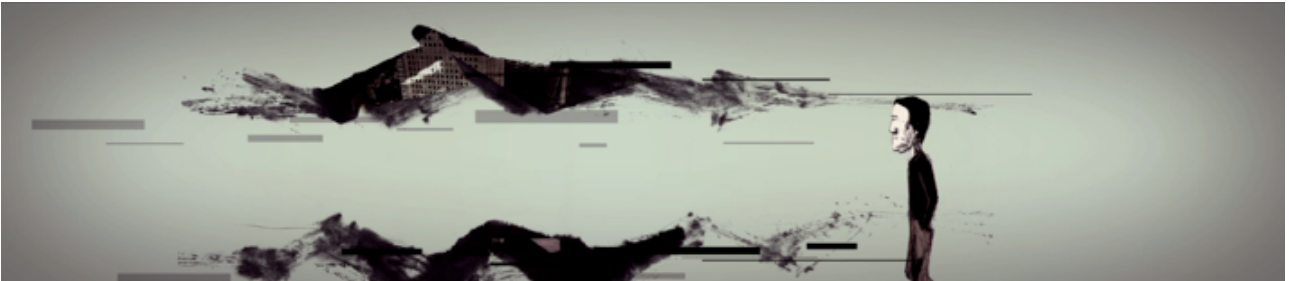


Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18



Figure 19

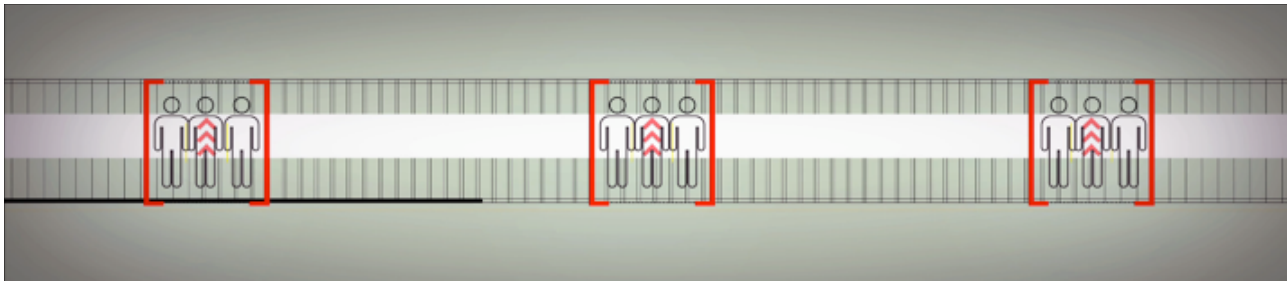


Figure 20

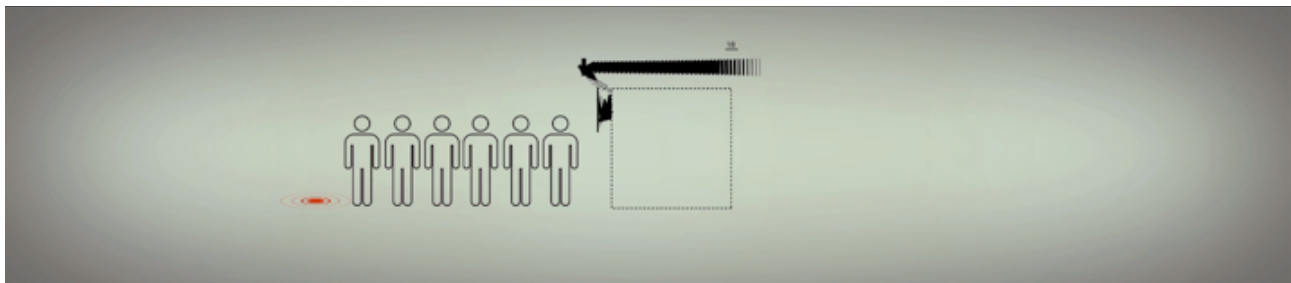


Figure 21

Time

Time is also one of the most important elements in the animation. When we look at time by itself, it appears to have a certain amount of control over the movement of a city. In the animation, time is represented by the pace of pedestrians and vehicles, accompanied by the rhythm of the clock hand. This pace shows the complementary relationship between people's movements and the development of the city. For that reason, time plays a crucial role in the animation—the bus and subway schedules, waiting for elevators (Figure 22), the standard hours of the work day. Time defines urbanites' movement, locations and the larger picture of city life. As shown in the scene in which the clock hand falls (Figure 23), I used symbolization to indicate that, as Benjamin states, “time [is] no longer a river in which human beings [are] immersed, moving steadily on the current. . . . Now, every present is determined by those images which are synchronic with it, every now is the moment of a specific recognition. In it, truth is loaded to the bursting point with time” (8). When we are moving from one point to another on foot, we can experience time as a continual river, but because traveling any other way relies on a schedule, we understand time as a beginning point and an end point. Therefore, in the animation, I highlight the starting and ending points, such as when people get on or off the subway. In this way, time divides urban life into distinct moments that define our movement.

3.2 Transformation

The transformation from the physical world to the symbol world is represented in three stages: physical nature, the transformation process, and the symbol world. The first stage imitates the real environment where people can see directly from the outside world into everyday life (Figure 24). Clark stated that “One need only look at the layers of the city that archaeologists show us. . . . they appear as a primordial and eternal fabric of life, an immutable pattern” (12). To describe such an “eternal fabric of life,” I combined the photos

I took of different cities with my hand drawing. This combination blurs the features of any particular city and, therefore, illustrates the similarity of cities in the age of globalization. The blur occurs not only because of the similarity of the architecture, but also indicates how visual elements are recorded in the mind during activity. Therefore, the “physical nature” part works as the clue that reminds the audience about the direct visual impression of cities.

The second stage is formed by two parts. The first is the process of shared urban memory developing from visual experience as represented by ink tracks. The tracks symbolize the visual impression of initial memory formation and indicate the starting point of the transformation of the animated world into symbols. The second part is composed of geometric images (patterns) based on urban architecture I have seen (Figure 25). This part can be regarded as the completion of the transformation to the symbol world. The group memory finally accomplishes a unified understanding of city life. The abstract symbols take the place of the real urban environment and finally creates a city “language” that speaks to its urbanites.

In the final stage, there are multiple symbols flowing along the city, expressing the regular movements of urbanites as a result of the communication with the symbolized environment (Figure 26). For the final step, I put similar micro-symbols in certain groups. “It [is] no longer a natural world in the sense it always had been,” (Solnit 18) and, therefore, the original chaos of the city disappears and is replaced by moving characters that are highly ordered and follow a certain pace. Correlated with the background sound of a consistent rhythm, the movement of these symbols can efficiently symbolize the unspoken language of city life.

3.3 Production process

Storyboards

Creating storyboards was the first step in making this animation. Visualizing the text in images and arranging the plot was a crucial stage (Figure 27). For this step, I simplified the symbols and focused only on actions and the turning points in the plot. Since storyboards only show the main scenes of a story, I made decisions about which single image would represent the complete meaning of each scene. I also made sure no important information was missing. In addition, I added one sentence on the bottom of each board to focus my ideas.

Creating storyboards for this animation was especially important because I used both drawing and computer animation, and they needed to work in harmony with each other. The storyboards enabled me to lay down these two visual languages on paper and adjust them, as well as clearly define the character's actions during the later stages of the process. Although the storyboard images were stable, I indicated certain tendencies of movement by adding lines and dots for both characters and symbols (Figure 28). For some elements that were in the process of transforming, I showed both real and symbol version in separate figures on the same page (Figure 29).

Animatic

After finishing the storyboards, I scanned them into a digital editing software application, Apple Final Cut Pro and put them in the timeline. It was good for me to consider the duration of each plotline so I could better understand how long a two-dimensional symbol needed to be on screen in this three dimensional space. Even though this animation is created on a two dimensional screen, I imagined the whole process in a three dimensional

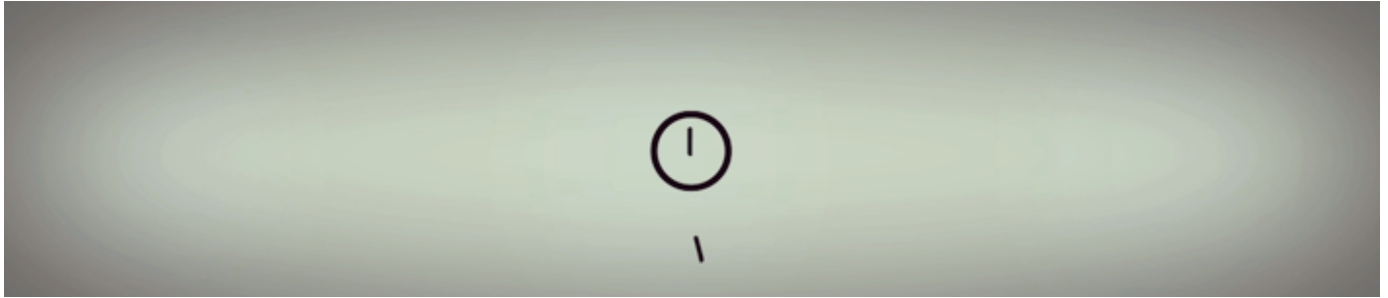


Figure 22



Figure 23

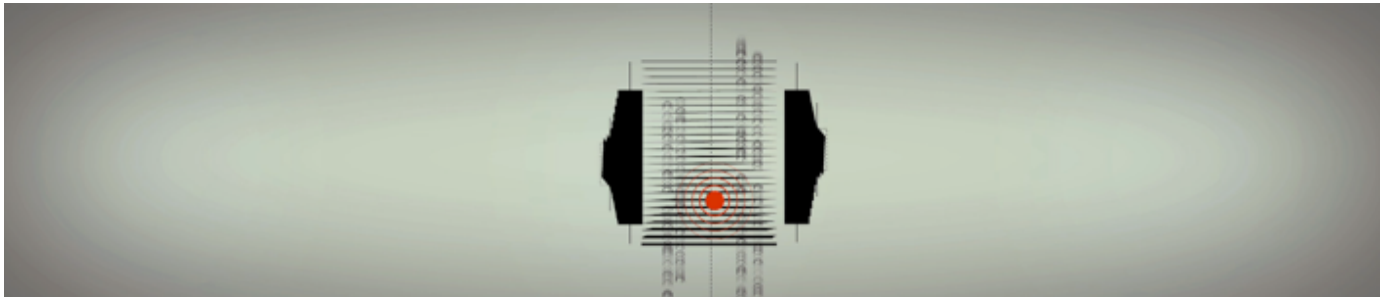


Figure 24



Figure 25

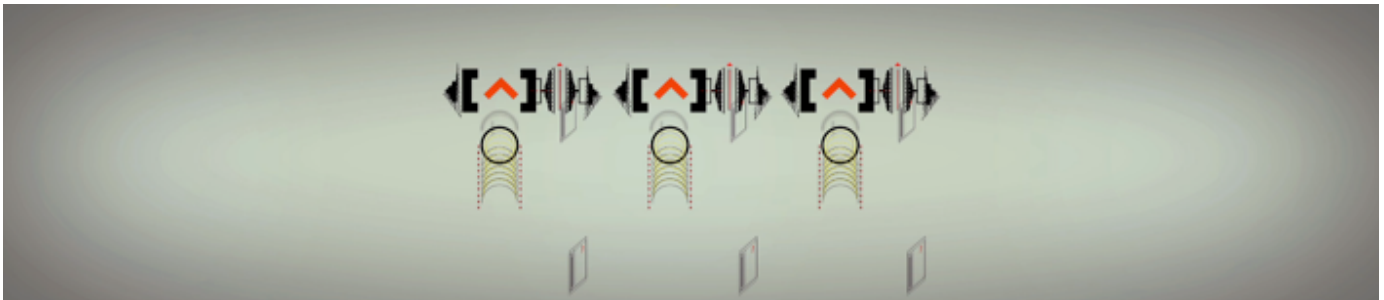
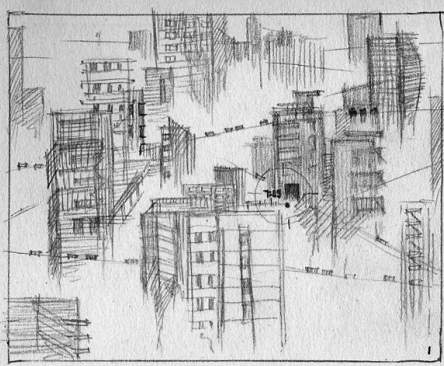
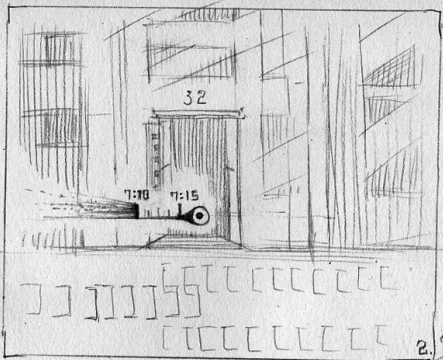


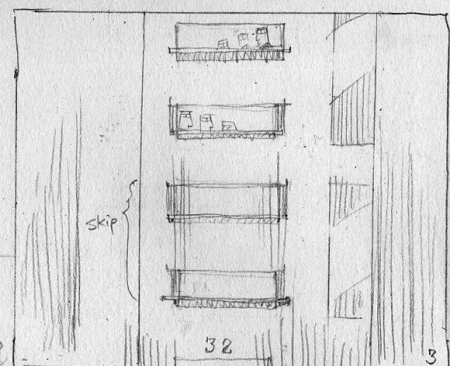
Figure 26



1. The story begins in a metropolitan. The day starts as normal, busy and noisy. Then suddenly, a time number appears and starts pumping out in the middle of the screen, right in front of a door of an apartment.



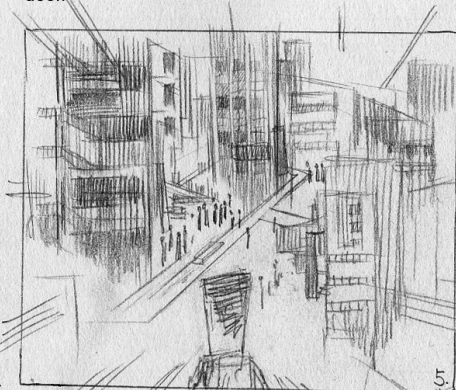
2. [zoom in to the door] The pumping-out time number is a part of the time line indicating the time fleeting. Symbols of passing tracks can be found in front of the door.



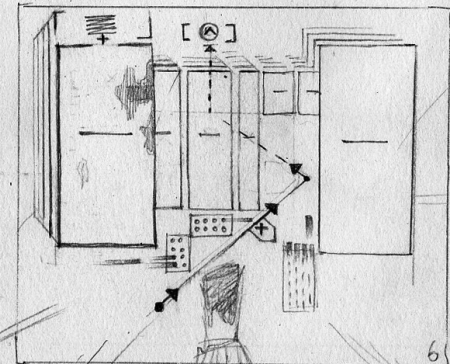
3. [go up] ME is stepping downstairs.



4. As soon as the time reaches the clock 7:20 am, ME appears at the door and steps outside.



5. What appears in front of ME is the perspective view of the city life, which seems disordered and everlasting.



6. The view immediately turns into a graphic diagram where all the physical elements are transferred to rational symbols of information.

Figure 27. Storyboards

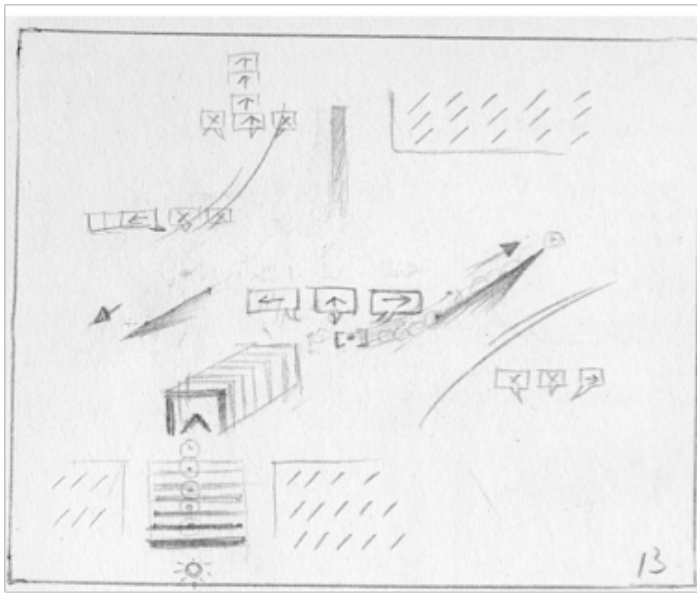


Figure 28

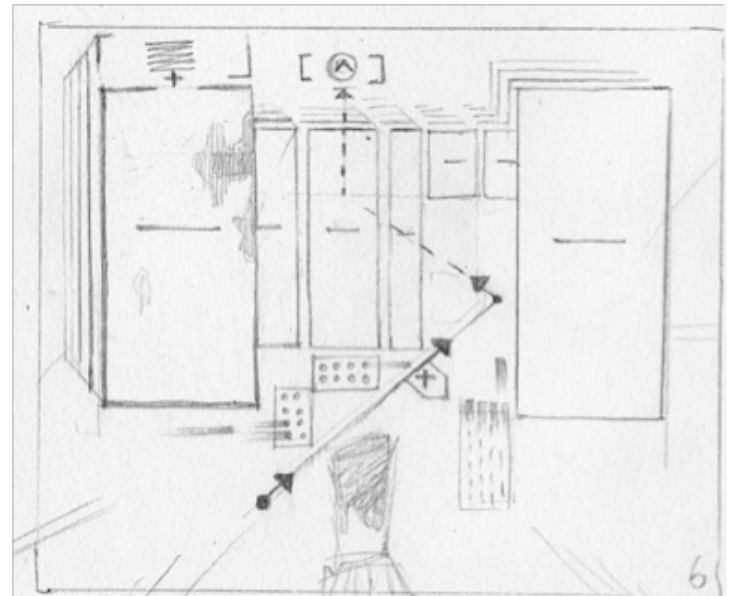


Figure 29

space in my head. When I put one storyboard image on the timeline, the animatic allowed me to pause or play the still images and thus, I could recall the previous experience of my own movement in space or with the elements that these symbols represent. Therefore, I could calculate their duration and these two-dimensional images and symbols thus gained yet another dimension, which is the dimension of time.

Sound

For the background sound, I decided to mix sound effects--the subway station, automatic doors, and even traffic noise —with music tones to compliment the visual rhythm and pace based on urban living. From an audience standpoint, the sound effects can make people recall viewers' previous experience in similar environments in cities and create a greater response and more connection to this piece. The sound may also help the audience interpret the symbols because these sounds are globally recognized. For example, when audiences see the abstract symbol of cars, by hearing the sound recorded from real cars, they can easily locate a connection between the virtual and the real.

Installation

To imitate the real experience of moving through a city, I projected the animation on three screens (Figure 30), creating a semi-enclosed space surrounded by three walls connected at 150-degree angles. This method improves the visual storytelling and can be helpful especially when telling a complicated story like this one with multiple plotlines occurring simultaneously. The audience therefore can gain the ability to understand the transformation process of language which is shown in abstract patterns. Thanks to the help from Tom Bray at Duderstadt Center, I gained familiarity with the Matrox Triplehead2go (Figure 31) which can allow three projectors to connect to a laptop and display the animation on three walls simultaneously. In order to successfully display the animation in the thesis exhibition,

I tested the animation in Slusser Gallery, in the same location where my MFA show will take place. The testing helped me figure out how to correctly position the equipment in the space and how to adjust the angles and distances between all the projectors and walls. It also allowed me to experience the piece from the audience's point of view.

The installation of this piece is also closely connected to its central theme. The animation invites audiences to step into a symbolized environment and experience the transformation of that environment by following the main character. The three screens create a curve-like scope similar to the eye. When the audience watches the animation, he must use his eyes and heads to turn from one side to the other as the plot unfolds on different screen (Figure 32). This set up assimilates the real situation urbanites encounter when they navigate space in the city and thus, the animation even may initiate bodily movement to let the audience become even more involved in a three dimensional experience. This installation also helps the audience understand the process of transformation more easily.

4. Conclusion

Nowadays, the world is highly globalized. The immigration of foreign populations into cities and the need to communicate with people who come from all over the world is becoming more common. Through the constant communication between different cultures and the shared information spreading among different cities, a similarity in terms of the rules of movement has developed among urbanites. The metropolis, the center where most immigration happens, appears to be the main location of such tendencies of adaptation. Based on my experience in different cities, seeing both architecture and public signs, and also invoking the ideogram feature of Chinese text characters, this animation uses symbols to explore the process of information exchange based on visual understanding. I

collected visual elements from cities and designed a series of abstract geometric symbols that deconstruct the visual impressions of physical environments, similar to how Chinese characters were designed. These symbols take on the features of text-based language, but at the same time, they are not constrained by any particular language. This process relies on the viewer's adaptation of elements with a similar visual appearance, as well as the viewer's

former urban experience, rather than verbal communication. Taking advantage of the use of symbols in this animation, I aim to visually represent the abstract process of information exchange between people, as well as people and their environment, in this time of globalization.

In this animation projected in three-dimensional space, audiences can experience a city where physical environments transform into symbols and the movements of characters follow changes at a stable and regular pace. Last but not least by using three dimensional projection, I change the simple method of displaying the movie and letting audience to experience the symbols' movements in a physically stereoscopic space. This method of video installation combines the physical environment with the virtual space of animation and thus vividly represents the world under going the process of symbolization.

Instead of inventing a new “world language” like Xu Bing did in his *Ground Book*, which can be applied by all cultures in daily life, the symbols I designed respond to my observation that people already communicate without language. The design of a “world language” focuses mostly on “learning” a universal way to navigate urban life. My symbols, on the other hand, explore the adaptation of appearances during the process of information exchange through symbolization. The symbols represent a complex process in a simple form. They question the transformation of global communication, in both Chinese culture and urban experience in other countries, rather than ignoring difference between cultures. Adaptation isn't imitation, and the symbols show that we have already developed a tacit agreement about our way of life even though it hasn't been achieved by using language. (Figure 33).

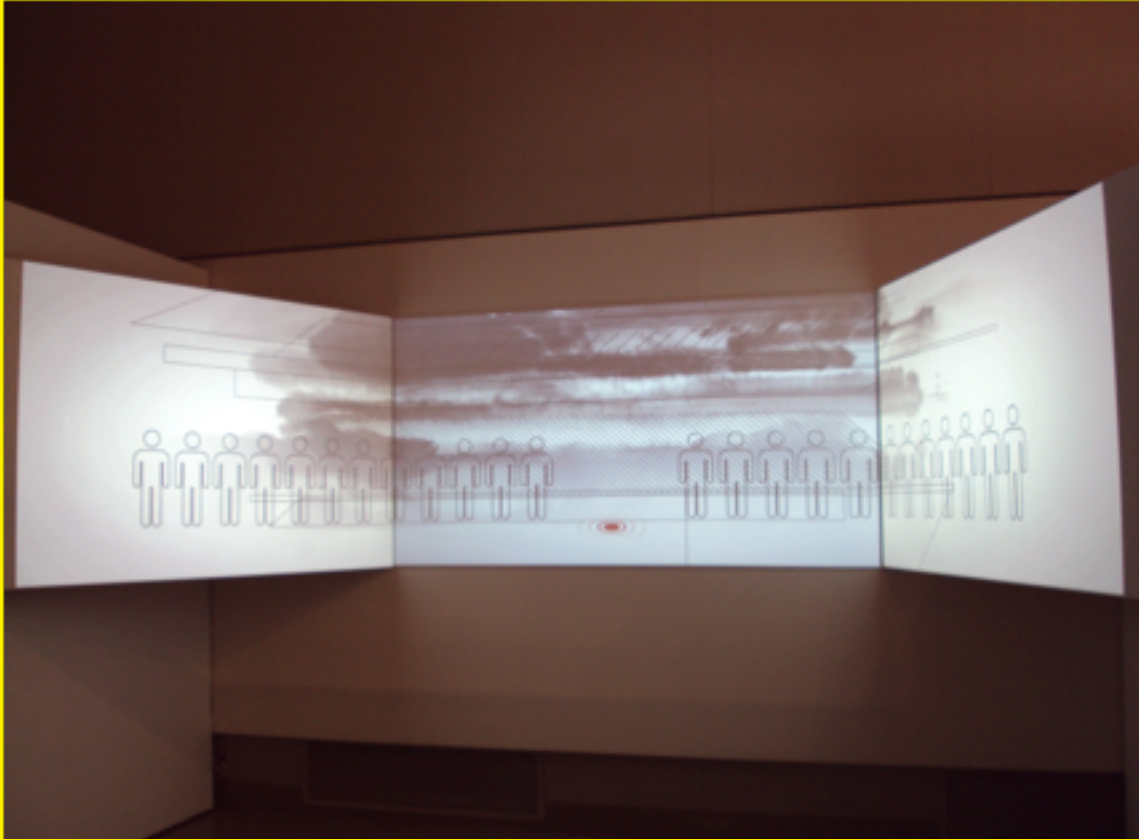


Figure 30



Figure 31. Projector, Laptop and Matrox Triplehead2go (Left to right)



Figure 32

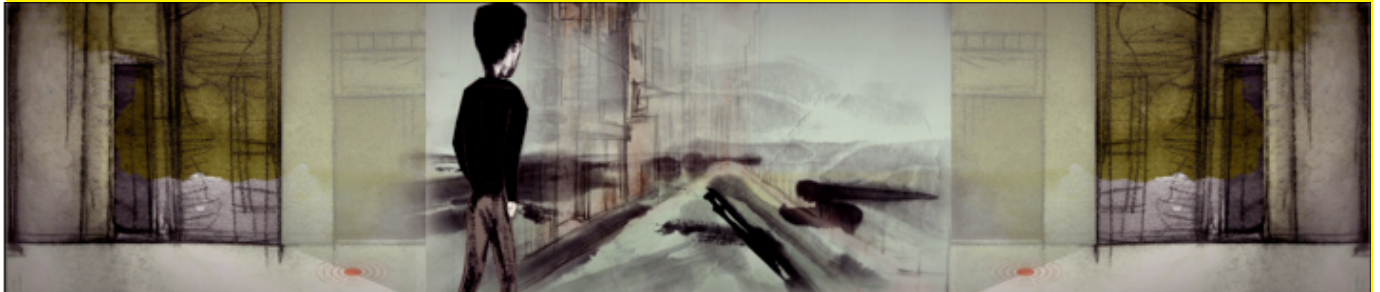


Figure 33

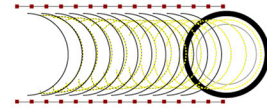
Glossary of Symbols



Standing People (Top)



Walking People (Top)



Queue (Top)



Car (Side)



Navigation



Car (Top)



Bus (Side)



Bus (Top)



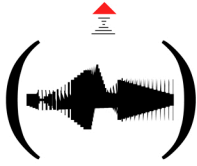
Entrance / Exit



Card



Gateport



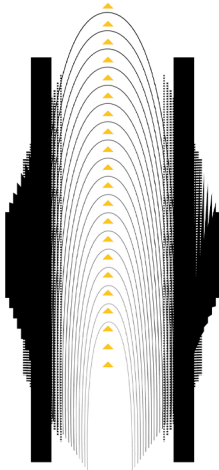
Ahead-Name



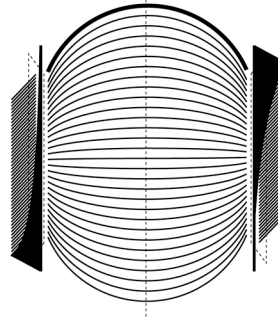
Right-Name



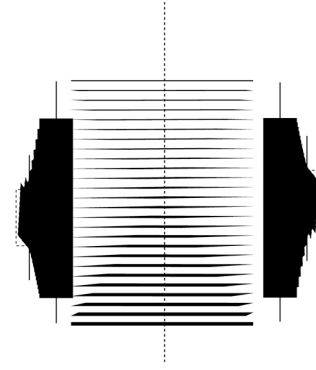
Left-Name



Escalator



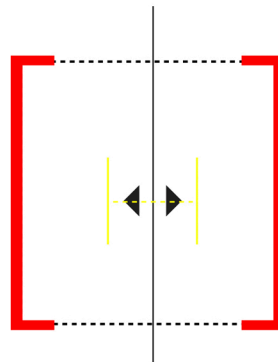
Hallway



Stairs



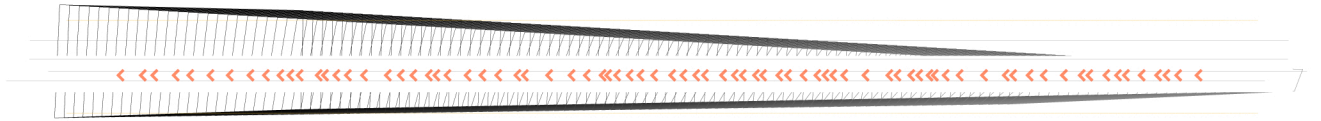
Moving Direction



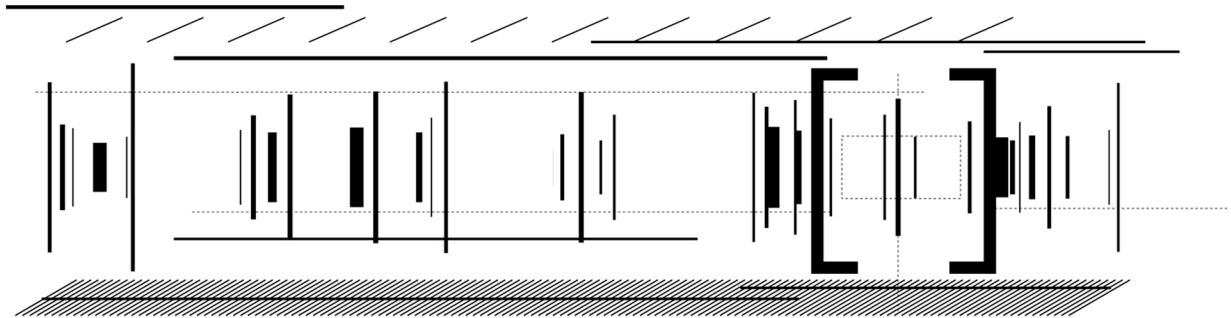
Automatic Door



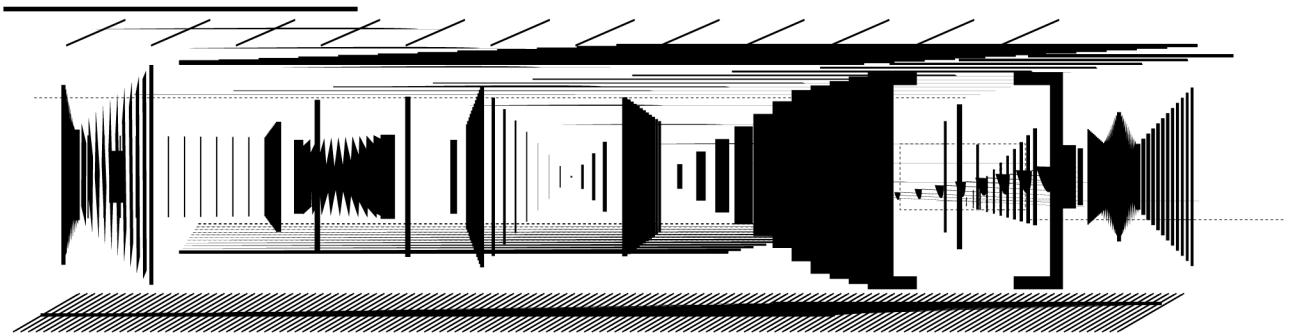
Moving Shadow



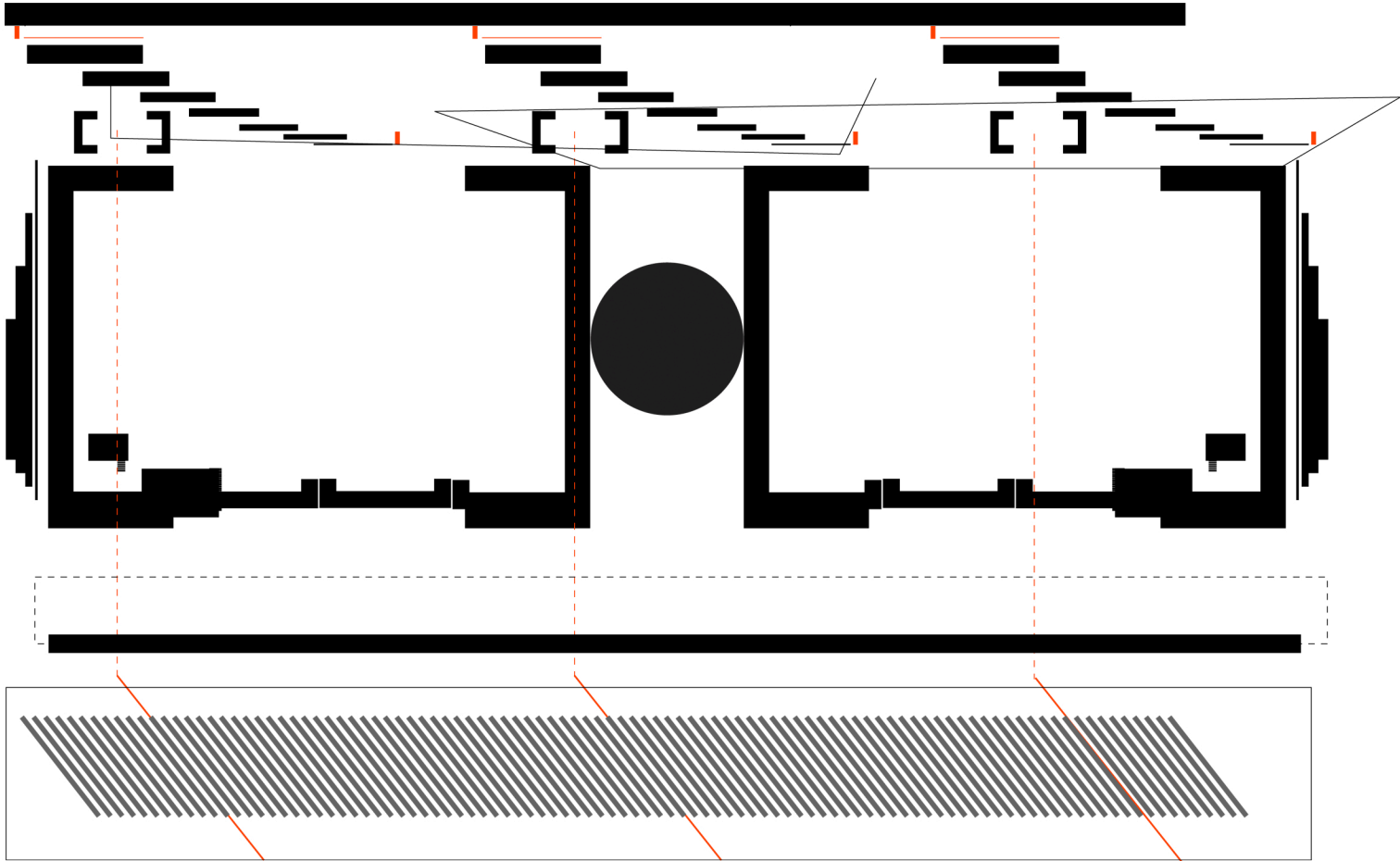
Subway train



Subway train (Stop)



Subway train (Moving)



Bus Station



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